

SOME PROBLEMS IN PRODUCING CURRENT INTELLIGENCE AND CURRENT ESTIMATES

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The Central Intelligence "Daily Summary," as published from 1946 to 1950, was adequate for its purpose and at times might be described as a brilliant performance within its limitations. (See No.) The principal problems affecting this publication had to do with (a) the advisability of producing it before any real groundwork had been laid for a Central Intelligence organization; (b) the question of how well it was serving its purpose, (c) the propriety of introducing such a publication without reference to the parallel efforts of the established intelligence agencies; and (d) the allocation and retention of this function within a Staff theoretically designed to produce a different kind of intelligence.

Paragraph 4 of the second directive of the National Intelligence Authority (February 8, 1946) states that:

"The Director of Central Intelligence will give first priority to the following tasks:

a. Production of daily summaries containing factual statements of the significant developments in the field of intelligence and operations related to the national security and to foreign events for the use of the President, the members of this Authority, and additional distribution...."

The reason for this provision seems to have been a desire to give the President easy access to all foreign information being received by the government. The President seems to have wanted such a service at

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once, but no facilities yet existed for the "production of daily summaries." In fact there was no such thing as a Central Intelligence Group in February, 1946 except in a plan, and a few individuals designated as the nucleus of a future organization. Most of these individuals had been assigned to the Central Reports Staff which was to have the duty of producing the Strategic and National Policy Intelligence specified in the President's letter. These persons were the most logical if not the only ones who could be used to produce summaries if they must be produced.

Hence at a time when the new Staff might well have been occupied exclusively with making the intricate plans that would be necessary before machinery for production of strategic intelligence could be put in motion, it found its time almost entirely taken up with the problem of summarizing daily dispatch traffic. Probably this was looked upon at the time as a temporary situation which would be corrected. Actually, it was never fully corrected. Even after the Central Reports Staff had become a large research organization it was still, in many respects, subordinating all other work to that of producing daily and weekly current intelligence. (See No.)

One reason why the Office developed in this way may be found in the President's attitude toward his intelligence summary. President Truman was personally pleased with it. He so expressed himself unofficially on more than one occasion. When the Secretary of State

objected that these digests were not "intelligence," Truman replied in effect that they might not be intelligence to anyone else, but they were intelligence so far as he was concerned.¹

To the Central Reports Staff and its successors Presidential approval constituted concrete encouragement at a time when encouragement was needed. By virtue primarily of the President's attitude, the Daily Summary occupied an almost inviolable position in the Office of Reports and Estimates. There was never any serious thought of abandoning it in spite of recurrent complaints from the other intelligence agencies that it was duplicative of their own work, proposals that it should be "coordinated" before transmission to the President, occasional complaints from within the Office that its production interfered with more essential activities, or the highly adverse opinions expressed in the Dulles-Jackson Report in January, 1949.

Nevertheless, the Daily was never on quite firm ground. Whatever may have been the President's attitude, there was still the problem of the other recipients (members of the Authority, their assistants, and the chief military commanders). The Secretary of State had always received, and continued to receive, his own intelligence summary, which went also to the President. Other recipients of the Daily had at their disposal similar daily digests furnished by their own departments.

The justification for having a Central Intelligence Summary in addition to the rest was, of course, that the Group had access to all

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1. Darling, A. B., Chapter III, p. 13

information as opposed to the Departments which had only their own. This was true, however, only in a manner of speaking. Central Intelligence, in this period, was getting almost all of its current information from the State Department. State and the Group, in fact, collaborated in producing their several summaries. State, however, would allow the Group to use only such information as it considered could properly be known outside the Department. Thus the Central Intelligence Summary was not actually based on all diplomatic intelligence. (see No.)

Although Central Intelligence had access to current military as well as diplomatic information, it did not have exclusive access to military traffic, nor did it by any means have unlimited access. Hence a flat statement in justification of the Central Intelligence Daily Summary that it was the sole means through which it was possible to keep current on all intelligence information currently available to the Government, was true more in theory than in fact.

There was also the problem of a form of presentation that might be suitable for all readers. From this point of view, the agreement made at the very outset of the Daily's existence and officially stipulated by the National Intelligence Authority that the Daily was to be purely "factual" created editorial difficulties. By Presidential order, the White House copy of the Daily contained also the text of all dispatches on which the current items were based. This was not true, however, with respect to the other recipients who had only factual statements without any sort of elaboration. Many of these, of course, were in the form of opinions from the field that left open the question of truth or

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probability where it was natural for readers to seek an evaluation. There were also cases where an item of information might have significance for a person thoroughly familiar with its area of origin but would be relatively meaningless for anyone less well informed.

Eventually these gaps were filled through authorization of interpretative comments in the Daily (See No.). But it is not surprising that in 1947 the editors of the Summary should have wished for guidance regarding the success of their efforts other than in the White House, and the steps that they should take to improve their publication in general.

If the resultant surveys undertaken by the Office of Collection and Dissemination beginning in the spring of 1947 had been more successful, the Daily Summary might have been modified. The most important of the surveys, however, which was completed on May 7, 1947, was of no practical use.¹

The persons undertaking it were apparently obliged (with the exception of Admiral Leahy) to get their information second hand. In other words they interviewed aides and assistants. Opinions they received in this way seem negative for the most part--spuriously complimentary or critical, and by no means harmonious. For example, the late Admiral Sherman then Deputy Chief of Naval Operations stated that he did not "know how he could get along without that book every day." General MacDonald, Chief of Air Intelligence, said on the contrary that he "did not feel too enthused" and that the Daily is so 'painfully brief'

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1. Copies of the surveys are in the CIA Library

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that "it is difficult and frequently impossible to grasp what is meant." One office commended the Daily, particularly on its style; another criticized the style as too "cute." There was no suggestion sufficiently unanimous to merit adoption.

The interview with Admiral Leahy indicated that the President was well satisfied, but it was evident that the President was uncritical. The Secretary of State had read the first issue of the Daily that had reached him after he took office, but he had not looked at an issue since. This, his aide explained, was nothing against the Daily; the Secretary was a very busy man and at the moment was in Moscow. It was evident that the only person in the Department of State who really read the Daily was the editor of its State Department equivalent. He displayed a polite lack of enthusiasm. Another State aide commended the Daily's "editorial philosophy."

The Secretary of War, though he was said to read the Summaries "avidly," had never said whether he liked them or not. It was to be assumed, according to his aide, that he did. The Secretary of the Navy was quoted as calling the publications "useful," but he thought he could get along without them. General Eisenhower read only what was brought specially to his attention. Admiral Nimitz' aide thought the Admiral must like them because he had not said that he did not. General Spaatz' office thought both publications 'very fine.'

The Survey leaves an impression of indifference on the part of those interviewed. It could be inferred that the Daily, if unobjectionable,

was certainly not indispensable. Little practical use could be made of such a Survey regarding policies for the Daily. Since there was nothing in the comments demanding change, the only logical course of action was to continue following the same basic principles as before, making such improvements as might be indicated from time to time.

This was in point of fact, the line taken by the editors. In spite of occasional proposed innovations, the Daily remained so consistent in its manner of presentation that the chief differences that would be noted between an issue of 1946 and an issue of 1950 would be in typography. The general principles underlying the form of the Daily might be summarized as follows:

1. The rule of brevity followed almost to extremes. This was a result of demands that the Daily be brief, but resulted in complaints that it was hard to follow.

2. The rule of attribution. By official order no statement could be made in the Daily unless its source was indicated in general and particular, a fact which led to a certain stylistic awkwardness.

3. The rule of exclusiveness in selection. Rather than attempt to include in each issue of the Daily all items that might be of importance to any recipient, the effort was to exclude all but that which was indispensable. The editors were always rigid in avoidance of selecting items merely because they were interesting in their own right. As a result of such refinements, the Daily did not always make stimulating reading.

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Probably the impact of the Daily on its readers was not great, primarily because most of them had other sources for the same information. Because it never became the subject of a sustained attack, however, it was assumed to be satisfactory and continued as a priority requirement of the Office of Reports and Estimates in spite of its obvious infringement on other and more important duties of the Office. (See Reitzel Report -- No. 3)

THE WEEKLY SUMMARY

The Central Reports Staff did not attempt a Weekly Summary until four months after it had begun publication of the Daily. The reason lay in the type of work involved. In essence, the Daily was a simple matter requiring only selection and summary. No matter how a weekly was written, it would mean some form of synthesis as affecting the week's events. To apply a rule of factuality to the Daily was feasible; with a weekly it was almost impossible.

A Weekly Summary would necessarily be something in the nature of a weekly news magazine. If the Weekly were to do no more than repeat, with no change, what the editors considered the most important items already reported in the Daily, a weekly would be redundant. Although it would not be necessary to go beyond reporting the news events of the week---in this case as reported through intelligence channels---it would be necessary to put these events together in some sort of coherent form.

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As a justifiable Central Intelligence publication, the Weekly was always marginal. In the first place, it lacked the primary justification for the Daily as a vehicle which would ensure awareness on the part of the President of day-to-day intelligence situations based on all departmental sources. In the second place, the Weekly could not help but suffer from competition. Not only were there several similar intelligence summaries, but there were all the national news magazines. Unlike the Daily, there could seldom be in the Weekly enough strictly secret intelligence (that is to say information that could not be read or inferred from the public prints) to justify it on that ground alone. Hence, the reader must compare what it said with what was available to him in magazines with large staffs of highly paid writers.

Chances of meeting such competition were further weakened from the beginning when instructions for handling the Weekly reflected the fear on the part of the Intelligence Advisory Board that the Central Intelligence Group might arrogate the functions of the Departments in rendering political and military advice to the President. Hence it was specified that both the summaries should be strictly non-interpretive. The Daily might be useful merely as a summary; but if the Weekly must refrain from interpretation of the week's events, it was obviously going to make dull reading. During the first few months of publication, the rule of factuality was as rigidly adhered to as was possible. Later, when the rule was relaxed, it was difficult to get away from the custom

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Doubts concerning the suitability of the Daily in 1947 were somewhat alleviated by the known approval of the President. In the case of the Weekly, there was nothing similar to go on. It was possible to draw an inference, however, that the Weekly Summary, in the form in which it was appearing, must leave a good deal to be desired.

Hence the surveys conducted by the Office of Collection and Dissemination in May, 1947 and thereafter were as much an effort to get guidance for production of the Weekly as for the Daily. In general, the Surveys showed that the Weekly was received with even less enthusiasm than the Daily. The President's Naval Aide thought that the President read the Weekly, but he was not sure. An even greater lack of interest was reflected in other quarters. The Surveys contained also a few mild complaints---for example, that the Weekly, being little more than a summary of the five preceding Dailies, was superfluous. Read candidly, the Surveys could well leave a doubt as to whether or not there was any good reason for continuing publication of the Weekly. Not only the readers but the editors themselves were dissatisfied with it as produced. Their feeling in general was that a weekly summary of the sort they visualized as desirable under the circumstances could not be produced with the facilities at their disposal.

These considerations were in the mind of the Chief of the Intelligence Staff on 3 April 1947, when he prepared a memorandum for the Assistant Director recommending that publication of the Weekly be suspended¹

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1. See Historical Files, safe #6364

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because: (a) the Office of Reports and Estimates did not have the staff in being or in prospect to produce an adequate Weekly; (b) suspension would release time to work on the "less exacting task" of the Situation Report series; (c) reporting supplementary to the Daily could be accomplished through special evaluations; (d) the Director had indicated an antipathy toward the Weekly and there were no signs of enthusiasm on the part of those over him; (e) the burden, on the Staff, of turning bad copy into acceptable articles was intolerable, and (f) suspension might prove the only means of eliciting candid opinions on the value of the Weekly from its recipients.

The reference to the Director was based on remarks made by Admiral Hillenkoetter at a meeting with the Intelligence Advisory Board. It was reasonable to conclude that if the Director did not support the Weekly, it was not for the producing office to recommend its continuance. More important than the Director's attitude from the point of view of the editors were the difficulties of producing a satisfactory summary in the absence of persons fully qualified to do the writing. The remark about the "less exacting task" of producing Situation Reports reflects the fact that the analytical type of mind that can grasp the significance of a situation and then express it briefly and succinctly in a magazine type of article was rare in the Office of Reports and Estimates considering the indispensability of such minds in such an organization. Without such people, the editors were forced virtually to do the writing themselves under conditions made more difficult by their own lack of specialized knowledge and the presence of inept intermediaries.

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Considering the later history of the Weekly, the proposal, coming at this early and experimental period, would seem to have had merit. At the time when it was made, however, it met with strong resistance. The Chief of the Far East Branch of the Office of Reports and Estimates commented that the Weekly was a fine publication, that it filled a definite need, and that his Branch was perfectly capable of coping with both the Weekly and the Situation Report program at once. The Chief of the Plans and Policies staff protested that the proposal was untimely, coming just after the production plan proposed by the Office of Reports and Estimates (which included the Weekly) had been officially accepted; that the Situation Reports could not take the Weekly's place, and that it would be best to wait for the impending new survey of the readers of the Weekly before deciding anything. The Deputy Assistant Director agreed with this point of view, particularly about the timeliness of the proposal, but based his argument chiefly on grounds that the editors would not find the Weekly such a burden if they stopped "requiring too rigid an adherence to their own concepts of phraseology and logical processes".

The end of the story is seen in a "Memorandum for Files" dated 8 May and written by the Assistant Director himself. Ultimate decision regarding the Weekly was to be held in abeyance, he wrote, because the Director had "tacitly" approved the present system of publications; and because after a debate in a staff meeting the "Director's decision was notified to the officers of ORE." The "memorandum for the files" concluded: "A theory

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now prevailing is that as Situation Reports and their periodic supplements or amendments are issued, the Weekly will shrivel and eventually 'wither away.' I am not convinced that this is entirely true - and am somewhat of the opinion that its continuance may prove desirable, at least for some time to come."¹

The point about desirability was never proved, but the Weekly continued to be published for three and a half years. During this time, it was the frequent target of proposals for change. Several "dry runs" were undertaken over the period, in which a new format or approach would be displayed. Some of them were adopted. The classification was for a time reduced from Top Secret to Secret in an effort to increase circulation and readability. The principal change occurred in 1949 when the Weekly was prepared on the basis of "inter-branch" publications (See No. 3) and was couched in a somewhat more popular vein.

As in the case of the Daily, however, changes like these could not really affect the nature of the publication. The fact that it was a weekly publication based chiefly on news received from intelligence sources and intended for the use of persons having a need for such information, fairly well circumscribed the form it would take. The fact that all or almost all of the same information could be derived from other publications, both classified and unclassified, likewise continued to circumscribe its usefulness. Hence, whatever might be the superficial form of presentation, the classification, or the distribution list, the

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1. For all above correspondence see Historical files,
safe # 6364

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Weekly remained from beginning to end, simply a weekly digest of news. The extent of interpretation and comment varied in accordance with the current inter-agency climate of opinion, but the latitude for comment was not great. The monthly "Review of the World Situation" was the real vehicle for Central Intelligence opinion, not the Weekly Summary.

All in all, it is doubtful that the Central Intelligence Weekly Summary at any time during its brief period of existence, carried much weight in the circles where it was, theoretically at least, read. It continued to be published probably because its sponsors felt more strongly in favor of its retention than its detractors did about suspending publication.

A resume of the contents of early Weekly Summaries is contained in Paper No. 8.

SOME ASPECTS OF THE PROBLEM OF INTER-AGENCY EXCHANGE
OF INFORMATION IN THE PERIOD 1946-1950

PAPER 5

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OF INFORMATION IN THE PERIOD 1946-1950

Although the Office of Reports and Estimates comprised all the elements necessary for analysis of intelligence, it was dependent for almost all the information it was analyzing upon sources which it did not control. Hence the success of the Office (and thus of Central Intelligence) in "correlating and evaluating intelligence relating to the national security" depended in part upon the extent to which State and the service agencies made information available.

This information consisted, generally speaking, of current and longer-term reporting from the field, and of studies made within the Departments for their own use.¹ During 1946-1950 the Office of Reports and Estimates undoubtedly was furnished with most of this intelligence. It is equally evident, however, that the Office did not receive, from official departmental sources, any information considered "operational," or information that any Department considered, in effect, its own property. Central Intelligence did not in other words receive all intelligence available to the United States Government.

This was, of course, contrary to the spirit as well as the letter of the rules applying to the post-war intelligence system. The first directive of the National Intelligence Authority, paragraph 7, states "There will be made available to you....all necessary facilities, intelligence and information in the possession of our respective departments....conversely, all facilities of the Central Intelligence Group and all intelligence prepared by it will be made available to us."